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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effects of training in argumentation and of initial candidate preference on perceptions and evaluations of presidential candidate debates. Subjects, 490 undergraduate speech communication students, were randomly assigned to three experimental conditions--control (no training), criteria only, and criteria plus explanations for their application--just prior to viewing the debate. Subjects also completed a questionnaire on demographic information and candidate preference (Ronald Reagan, Walter Mondale, Other, and Undecided). Subjects then viewed the televised debate. Subjects' post-debate perceptions of the candidates were measured using two 35-item semantic differential scales and a single scale representing a global assessment of performance in the debate. Finally each subject rank ordered ten performance-related criteria in terms of the importance of each to the subject's evaluations of the candidate. The most noticeable result centered on the uncommitted subjects' perceptions of the candidates. The effects of training on those who had an initial commitment to a candidate were more ambiguous. A statistically significant training/preference interaction effect was observed for the subject's perceptions of Reagan on both the "capability" and "personableness" dimensions. Uncommitted subjects who had viewed Reagan more negatively on the "capability" dimension as a result of training evaluated Mondale in just the opposite way. Those uncommitteds who were trained evaluated Reagan's performance less favorably than did those in the control group. While these findings might suggest that only a portion of those exposed to training are influenced by it, the effect of such training can be significant in some elections. (HTH)

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THE EFFECTS OF PRE-DEBATE TRAINING ON VIEWERS'
PERCEPTIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

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THE EFFECTS OF PRE-DEBATE TRAINING ON VIEWERS'
PERCEPTIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Rationale

The 1984 campaign marked the fourth time in recent history that major-party presidential candidates faced each other in nationally televised campaign debates. Such events have now occurred in each of the last three election campaigns. In each instance, the debates have represented a focal point, if not a turning point, in the campaign for they have attracted large audiences of potential voters and substantial media attention both before and after the debates.

Despite the apparent popularity of the campaign debates, these encounters have not enjoyed universal approval. Critics have roundly condemned the press conference formats and the communication behaviors of the participants as not being conducive to "genuine" debate, that "confrontation of opinion" through which we "move closer to moral and political truth" through the application of evidence and reasoned argument.¹ Instead, "we tolerate sophistry, salesmanship, and sometimes 'degradation of opinion' by emphasizing personalities not issues."² Anticipating the debates in 1984, Sidney Kraus speculated, "If the results of the 10 previous televised debates are any guide, voters watching the October debates between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale and between George Bush and Geraldine Ferraro will make their judgments based first on the candidates' personalities and images, and then on issues. Apparently the way a candidate expresses a view has been more important to voters than the view itself."³

Debates between presidential candidates present a challenge. On the one hand we regard the debates as having a significant potential for contributing to the democratic process; yet, in practice, the debates may fall short of this ideal. Nevertheless, they enjoy large audiences and may influence the results of the election. Thus, we should examine the presidential campaign debates with an eye toward improving them.

The format of the debates has often been the focus for suggested improvements. Communication scholars, political scientists and journalists have argued on behalf of numerous proposals to alter the "dual press conference" formula that all of the modern presidential debates have used. The participants have rejected proposals for radical departures in format, probably because they have become comfortable with the press conference environment. As Myles Martel has noted, "Political campaign debates are bound to

persist with few, if any, changes, despite carping by journalists and scholars who criticize formats for 'their emphasis on glibness and images rather than on issues.'"

If it is unlikely that the format will be changed, perhaps the course of campaign debates could be improved if the audience were changed. Viewers approach the debates with a set of expectations of what should occur. These expectations may owe little to the model of debate as reasoned argument. Most likely, viewer expectations are influenced by interpretations of the role of debates in prior campaigns or by pre-debate commentary from the current campaign, both of which are likely to emphasize the importance of image.

Specifically, we chose to focus on providing listeners with content-related criteria for evaluating a political debate. If listeners were informed of relevant criteria would they evaluate a debate differently than uninformed viewers? If so, it might suggest that a broad-based program of public education during the days preceding a debate could create a more knowledgeable and critical audience to which candidates would be required to adapt. If viewers could be convinced to apply traditional debate criteria to the evaluation of presidential debates, it is likely that participants in the debate would strive to incorporate those qualities into their performances.

Although the initial impetus for the study was to determine the effects of training in argumentation on viewers' perceptions of the debates, the variable of viewers' initial commitment to a candidate could not be ignored. Data from previous debates suggest a strong tendency for partisans to perceive their preferred candidate as having "won" the debate." Thus, the study was designed to examine the effects of both training in argumentation and initial candidate preference.

Method

Design

In order to assess the combined effects of pre-debate training and preference on viewers' perceptions and evaluations of presidential candidates, a 3X4 factorial design was used. This design corresponded with three levels of training (no training, criteria only, and criteria plus explanation), and four levels of initial preference (Reagan, Mondale, other and undecided). "Presidential Preference," it may be observed, did not constitute a true experimental condition, as subjects merely expressed such on a pre-debate questionnaire.

In Training Condition #1 (the control group), subjects were provided only with a one paragraph summary of the history of televised presidential debates, and requested to "watch carefully," so as to render post-debate evaluations of the candidates' performances. In Condition #2, subjects were provided with identical instructions, along with a list of three criteria upon which to base their evaluations:

- (1) To what extent do the candidates respond fully and relevantly to the questions?
- (2) To what extent do the candidates offer well-supported reasons for their positions?
- (3) To what extent do the candidates effectively refute the positions expressed by their opponent?

Finally, subjects in Condition #3 were provided with all of the above in addition to brief explanations as to how each of the criteria should be applied. Copies of each of these sets of instructions may be found in Appendix A.

The rationale behind Training Condition #2 (criteria only) was to test a "mere exposure" type of hypothesis. In other words, would merely stating the criteria to be applied be sufficient to redirect the attention of viewers and therefore alter their perceptions of the debate.

Subjects and Procedures

The subjects in the current study were 490 undergraduate students enrolled in the basic speech communication course at Marshall University. Students were awarded a few points of extra credit for participating in the study.

As students arrived at a general meeting area on the evening of the first debate between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale (October 7, 1984), they were randomly assigned to classrooms corresponding with the three experimental conditions. Prior to the beginning of the debate, all subjects completed a brief, pre-debate questionnaire containing a number of demographic items, including "Presidential Preference" (see Appendix B). Each subject was also provided with instructions corresponding to one of the three experimental conditions (see Appendix A). After viewing the debate in its entirety (each room was equipped with a color television monitor), subjects completed several sets of scales pertaining to the debate and were then dismissed.

Subjects were provided with feedback about the nature of the study through their instructors during the week after the debate.

Dependent Measures

Essentially, three different sets of scales were employed in this study to assess the effects of training and initial preference on subjects' perceptions and judgments regarding the debate. Subjects' post-debate perceptions of the candidates were measured utilizing two, thirty-five item semantic differential scales (one set per candidate). Each of the semantic differential scales was based on past research, either as representative of an established conceptual domain (e.g. "character"), or an item specifically included in past research on presidential debates (e.g. "young-old"), or both.

Each subject also evaluated each candidate on a single scale representing a global assessment of performance in the debate. This corresponded with the usual sort of question asked in post-debate evaluations: "Who won?"

Finally, each subject was asked to rank order a list of ten performance-related criteria in terms of the importance of each to the subject's evaluations of the candidates. This list contained both substantive items like those identified in the training instructions (e.g. "responded to questions directly and completely"), and delivery-related behaviors (e.g. "used gestures to emphasize his points"). These rankings, it was hoped, would serve as a type of manipulation check to determine whether subjects in each of the three training conditions saw themselves as having focused on different criteria in evaluating the candidates. In other words, did those in Training Conditions #2 and #3 perceive themselves as having used more debate-relevant criteria in evaluating the performances of the candidates than those in the control group (Condition #1)? Were such perceived differences reflected in corresponding different evaluations of the candidates? These were the questions the present investigators attempted to address by means of the manipulation check. The complete set of all variable scales is included in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

All data were analyzed with the assistance of the SAS statistical package. The semantic differential scales were submitted to a principal components factor analysis followed by a varimax, orthogonal rotation to simple structure. Those factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.00 were taken into the initial rotation for further consideration. Factor scores were produced for those factors determined to constitute interpretable conceptual domains. These, in turn, were used as dependent variables in subsequent analyses.

Tests of the interactive effects of Presidential Preference and Training Condition on the various dependent measures were accomplished by means of the SAS General Linear Model (GLM) and Discriminant Analysis Procedures. Post-hoc Scheffé tests were computed "by hand" where appropriate.

Results

Factor Analysis of Scales

Principal components analysis of the semantic differential scales resulted in six factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00; this was true for both sets of scales ("Reagan" and "Mondale"). In both cases, as well, there was a marked tendency toward the emergence of a single, general factor, as is illustrated by the eigenvalues of the unrotated factors (see Table 1).

Table 1
Initial Communalities (Variances) for Unrotated Factors

Factor	Reagan	Analysis	Mondale
Factor 1	15.40		13.04
Factor 2	1.48		1.78
Factor 3	1.45		1.53
Factor 4	1.17		1.46
Total	19.50		17.82

As is also apparent, this tendency was somewhat more pronounced for the "Reagan" than the "Mondale" scales.

This tendency notwithstanding, the present researchers sought a solution which was conceptually meaningful as well as statistically justifiable; a four-factor solution seemed to best satisfy these dual criteria. A four-factor solution also resulted in the greatest similarity between the "Reagan" and "Mondale" cases. In each case, those factors retained for further analysis had initial eigenvalues greater than 1.0, were defined by three or more variables, and were conceptually interpretable.

While the nature and order of the factors were not

isomorphic for the "Reagan" and "Mondale" analyses, it was determined that sufficient similarity existed to use the same labels for both sets of factors: "Capability" (Competence), "Personableness" (Sociability), "Character," and "Dynamism." It is evident that these are credibility factors which closely resemble those uncovered in previous research. This, the authors felt, lent further credence to the viability of a four-factor solution. The complete list of variables with associated factor loadings and other pertinent data is presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Factor scores were computed for each subject on these four dimensions for both the "Reagan" and "Mondale" sets of scales, and were utilized as dependent measures in subsequent tests of the hypotheses of this study.

Hypothesis Test

The central hypothesis of the present investigation posited a significant relationship between the combined effects of training and preference and viewers' perceptions and evaluations of the candidates. More specifically, it was hypothesized that viewers' judgments would increasingly be based on debate-relevant criteria as a function of training, and that this effect would be most pronounced for those who were not initially committed to a candidate. This hypothesis was, at least partially, supported.

A multivariate analysis of variance of subjects' perceptions of "Reagan" on the four previously identified factors revealed a significant training x preference interaction (Wilks' Lambda = .89, $p < .001$). Inspection of the ANOVA results for each of the individual dependent variables suggests that between-group differences on "Capability" ($F = 2.53$, $p < .02$), and "Personableness" ($F = 2.63$, $p < .02$), were primarily responsible for the observed effect.

Post-hoc Scheffé tests revealed ten significant ($\alpha = .05$) pair-wise comparisons on the "Capability" factor and five on the "Personableness" factor as shown in Tables 4 and 5 respectively. Of particular note is the fact that while the Reagan supporters and Uncommitteds rated Reagan significantly higher than the Mondaleites on "Capability" in Training Condition #1 (control group), the Mondale supporters and Uncommitteds shared significantly lower ratings of Reagan than the Reaganites in Training Condition #3 (criteria plus explanation). This is primarily due to the lower rating of Reagan by the Uncommitteds as a function of training as is clearly illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 2
Rotated Factor Loadings for "Reagan"

Item	Factor Capa- bility	Persona- bleness	Integ- rity	Dyna- mism
Logical-Illogical	.56*	.40*	.41	.05
Active-Passive	.46	.52*	.16*	.11
Open-Closed	.35	.11*	.62*	.09
Warm-Cold	.20	.66*	.35	.04
Strong-Weak	.56	.58*	.23	.10
Moral-Immoral	.15	.07	.73*	-.04*
Conservative-Liberal	-.43	.33*	.10	.47*
Energetic-Lethargic	.40*	.66*	.12	.19
Direct-Evasive	.47*	.20*	.41	-.12
Friendly-Hostile	.20	.53	.29	.08
Confident-Unconfident	.53*	.42	.17*	.24
Fair-Unfair	.33	.35	.61*	-.03
Religious-Irreligious	.29*	.22	.46*	.06
Informed-Uninformed	.63*	.24	.34	.13
Qualified-Unqualified	.58*	.23	.46	.03
Extroverted-Introverted	.07	.14	.18*	.68*
Sincere-Insincere	.42	.50*	.51	.07
Humorous-Humorless	.02*	.48*	.29	.00
Decisive-Indecisive	.62*	.30	.28*	.07
Just-Unjust	.41	.42	.54*	.02
Attractive-Unattractive	.25*	.38	.48*	.02
Intelligent-Unintelligent	.62*	.36*	.22	-.02
Animated-Lifeless	.41	.55*	.10*	.02
Honest-Dishonest	.40	.35*	.61*	.00
Likeable-Unlikeable	.41	.57*	.40	.01
Hard-Soft	.33*	-.17	-.27	.60*
Consistent-Inconsistent	.60*	.23	.50	.04
Clear-Vague	.73*	.27	.32	-.03
Wise-Foolish	.61*	.36	.40	.03
Interesting-Dull	.48*	.39	.43	.05
Genuine-Phony	.46	.52*	.43	.07
Pleasant-Unpleasant	.32	.59*	.44	.04
Flexible-Inflexible	.21	.54*	.11*	-.39
Ethical-Unethical	.06	.38*	.53	.09
Young-Old	.17	.45*	.10	.00
Variance explained by each factor	6.51	6.05	5.53	1.40

Final Communalities Estimates: Total = 19.51

Table 3
Rotated Factor Loadings for "Mondale"

Item	Factor Capa- bility	Integ- rity	Persona- bleness	Dyna- mism
Logical-Illogical	.60*	.38	.04	.31*
Active-Passive	.30	.23*	.17	.55*
Open-Closed	.31	.59*	.20	.13
Warm-Cold	.19	.63*	.33	.08*
Strong-Weak	.46	.24	.23	.50
Moral-Immoral	.13	.69*	.17	.11
Conservative-Liberal	.01	.33	-.37	.01*
Energetic-Lethargic	.19*	.22	.40	.52*
Direct-Evasive	.65*	.10*	.07	.05
Friendly-Hostile	.15	.60	.19	.13
Confident-Unconfident	.29	.25*	.17	.52*
Fair-Unfair	.46	.61*	.08	.05
Religious-Irreligious	.12*	.58*	-.02	.17
Informed-Uninformed	.47*	.32	.06	.45
Qualified-Unqualified	.64*	.36	.03	.16
Extroverted-Introverted	-.11	.24*	.29	.49*
Sincere-Insincere	.40	.61	.18	.12
Humorous-Humorless	.18*	.27	.38	.12
Decisive-Indecisive	.47*	.18	.11	.45
Just-Unjust	.54	.53	.05	.19
Attractive-Unattractive	.31*	.31	.42*	.07
Intelligent-Unintelligent	.45*	.41	.13*	.43
Animated-Lifeless	.13	.15*	.63*	.32
Honest-Dishonest	.44*	.61	.13	.09
Likeable-Unlikeable	.54*	.48	.30	.06
Hard-Soft	.04*	-.18	-.13	.67*
Consistent-Inconsistent	.69*	.24	.15	.16
Clear-Vague	.75*	.11	.20	.14
Wise-Foolish	.70*	.24	.19	.24
Interesting-Dull	.57*	.12	.52	.13
Genuine-Phony	.66*	.35	.29*	.11
Pleasant-Unpleasant	.45	.38	.50*	.09
Flexible-Inflexible	.37	.19*	.44*	-.18
Ethical-Unethical	.35	.45*	.30*	.15
Young-Old	.06	.12	.61*	.10
Variance explained by each factor	6.50	5.34	2.99	2.98
Final Communalities Estimates: Total = 17.82				

Table 4
Significant Pair-Wise Comparisons for Subjects'
Perceptions of Reagan on Factor 1 (Capability)
(alpha = .05)

Reagan, Training 1	X	Mondale, Training 1
Reagan, Training 1	X	Mondale, Training 2
Mondale, Training 1	X	Uncommitted, Training 1
Mondale, Training 1	X	Reagan, Training 2
Mondale, Training 1	X	Reagan, Training 3
Uncommitted, Training 1	X	Mondale, Training 2
Reagan, Training 2	X	Mondale, Training 2
Mondale, Training 2	X	Reagan, Training 3
Reagan, Training 3	X	Mondale, Training 3
Reagan, Training 3	X	Uncommitted, Training 3

Table 5
Significant Pair-Wise Comparisons for Subjects'
Perceptions of Reagan on Factor 2 (Personableness)
(alpha = .05)

Reagan, Training 1	X	Mondale, Training 1
Reagan, Training 1	X	Mondale, Training 2
Mondale, Training 1	X	Reagan, Training 2
Mondale, Training 1	X	Reagan, Training 3
Reagan, Training 2	X	Mondale, Training 2

As regards the "Personableness" factor, the ratings of Reagan converge as a function of training, in this case primarily due to the increasingly positive evaluations by the Mondale supporters (see Figure 2).

While a significant main effect of Preference obtained for both the "Integrity" and "Dynamism" factors for Reagan, this finding was neither surprising nor relevant to the purpose of this study.

On the surface the analysis of variance results of subjects' perceptions of "Mondale" on the four factors were more clear cut but less encouraging. The multivariate test of an interaction effect was not significant at the pre-determined alpha level of .05; neither were any of the individual univariate tests.

A significant main effect of Preference did obtain on the "Capability," "Integrity," and "Personableness" factors, but, again, this was deemed peripheral to the focus of the study.

While, as stated previously, no statistically significant results obtained for the "Mondale" analyses, it is interesting to note that a consistent trend emerged. Whereas the Undecideds evaluated "Reagan" more negatively on "Capability" as a function of training, they evaluated "Mondale" more positively. These reverse trends are clearly illustrated in Figure 3.

Moreover, these findings are substantially corroborated by the results of the tests of subjects' evaluations of the overall performances of Reagan and Mondale. The reader will recall that these two items (one each for Reagan and Mondale), constituted the second set of dependent measures used in this study. Once again, Undecideds evaluated Reagan's performance more negatively and Mondale's performance more positively as a function of training as reflected in Figure 4. It must be pointed out that these results, again, were not statistically significant. Thus, caution is warranted when attempting to draw conclusions from them.

Finally, no statistically significant nor conceptually consistent findings obtained in regard to the effects of training on those previously committed to one of the candidates. This is consistent with the research hypothesis posited by the current investigators.

Manipulation Check

A secondary line of analysis in this study addressed the

issue as to whether subjects in the various training conditions would report having used different criteria in evaluating the candidates (or, more accurately, having placed emphasis on different criteria). No overall, multivariate Training x Preference interaction effect obtained; neither was there a main effect of training on the ranking of the ten criteria, either overall or individually. A significant univariate ($p < .02$) Training x Preference interaction did obtain for one of the criteria ("refuted the arguments of his opponent") while two others ("spoke clearly and articulately," and "was friendly and courteous") approached statistical significance ($p < .06$). Although these latter two criteria are delivery-related items, "refuted the arguments of his opponent" was one of the criteria identified in the pre-debate instructions. Interestingly enough, Reagan supporters reported having placed increasing emphasis on this criteria as a function of training ($\bar{X}$ s = 6.75, 5.75 and 5.40 for Training Conditions 1, 2 and 3 respectively--the lower the number, the more important the criteria), while the Uncommitteds reported having placed less emphasis on this criterion with training ($\bar{X}$ s = 5.32, 6.15 and 6.04 for the three training conditions).

Although the trends are not statistically significant, the uncommitteds reported having placed more emphasis on "spoke clearly and articulately" and "responded to questions directly and completely" as a function of training. The latter was, again, one of the three training criteria. In the main, it should be noted, subjects seem to have used similar criteria in evaluating the candidates; at least this is what they seem to have believed. Individual cell means for each of the above mentioned criteria by Preference and Training Condition are presented in Table 6.

Discussion

The most interesting findings of this study centered on the perceptions of the candidates by uncommitted subjects. The effects of training on those who had an initial commitment to a candidate were more ambiguous.

A statistically significant training x preference interaction effect was observed for the subjects' perceptions of "Reagan" on both the "Capability" and "Personableness" dimensions. This effect was accounted for primarily by the changes in the attitudes of the uncommitted subjects.

In light of the above finding, some other results are interesting. Uncommitted subjects who had viewed "Reagan" more negatively on the "Capability" dimension as a result of training evaluated "Mondale" in just the opposite way. As a result of training, the uncommitteds tended to evaluate

Table 6
Mean Rankings for Each of the Ten Debate
Criteria by Training and Preference

Training Condition	Preference	N	Criteria	Mean Ranking
1	1	85	Clarity	5.10
1	2	26	"	5.15
1	3	31	"	5.90
2	1	82	"	5.14
2	2	26	"	5.26
2	3	40	"	4.98
3	1	85	"	5.89
3	2	22	"	5.13
3	3	41	"	4.53
1	1	85	Directness	3.01
1	2	26	"	3.96
1	3	31	"	3.32
2	1	82	"	2.97
2	2	26	"	4.07
2	3	40	"	4.00
3	1	85	"	2.74
3	2	22	"	3.81
3	3	41	"	2.68
1	1	85	Refuted	6.75
1	2	26	"	6.42
1	3	31	"	5.32
2	1	82	"	5.75
2	2	26	"	6.26
2	3	40	"	6.15
3	1	85	"	5.40
3	2	22	"	6.54
3	3	41	"	6.04

Training Conditions: 1 = Control; 2 = Criteria Only; 3 =
Criteria plus explanation.

Preference: 1 = Reagan; 2 = Mondale; 3 = Uncommitted.

"Mondale" more positively on the "Capability" dimension although this trend was not statistically significant. The overall evaluation of the candidates by uncommitteds reveals a similar trend. Those uncommitteds who were trained evaluated Reagan's performance in the debate less favorably than did those in the control group. Correspondingly, uncommitteds regarded Mondale's performance more favorably as a result of training, though, again, these findings were not statistically significant.

Furthermore, the post hoc tests confirm the movement among the uncommitteds. In the control group, uncommitteds were more similar to the Reagan supporters than to those who favored Mondale. But among those in Training Condition 3, the uncommitteds more closely resembled the Mondale partisans than the Reagan supporters. Thus, once again, training appears to have altered the perceptions of the uncommitteds, primarily on the "Capability" dimension. It should not be surprising that the "Capability" dimension showed the most significant change as the training focused on characteristics most closely related to that quality.

While these findings might suggest that only a portion of those exposed to training are influenced by it, the effect of such training can be significant in some elections. When there are large numbers of undecided voters, or when a close election can be influenced by the shift of a small number of votes, pre-debate training can be especially potent, even if it has little effect on those who are committed to a candidate.

Future research might also examine the type and extent of training provided. The training provided in this study was quite modest. Perhaps more extensive training would more clearly influence the frame of reference through which the debate was perceived. The current study chose to use a limited training program because this type of program might be more feasible to employ as part of a mass education program. Nevertheless, it could be that the limited training was insufficient to alter the perspectives of some subjects who would have been affected by a different approach to training.

Forensics educators should be especially interested in these issues. Perhaps we might enhance the process of political debates by engaging in pre-debate campaigns to educate audiences in appropriate means of evaluation. If viewers could be taught to employ traditional debate criteria to evaluate campaign debates, candidates would be required to adapt to this new reality. Eventually, campaign debates would turn on issue-related rather than image-related factors.

Figure 1
Perceptions of Reagan on Factor 1 (Capability) as a
Function of Training (Expressed in Standard Scores)

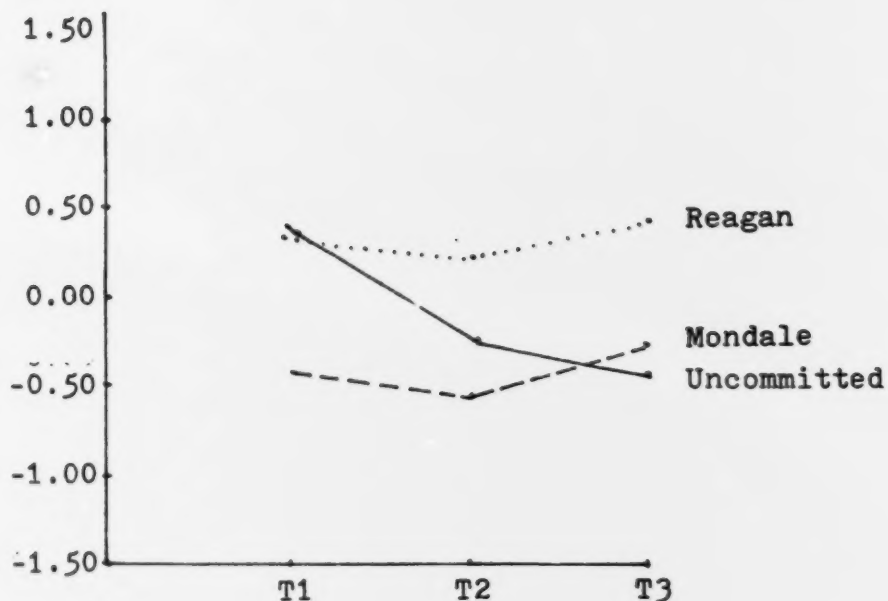


Figure 2
Perceptions of Reagan on Factor 2 (Personableness) as a
Function of Training (Expressed in Standard Scores)

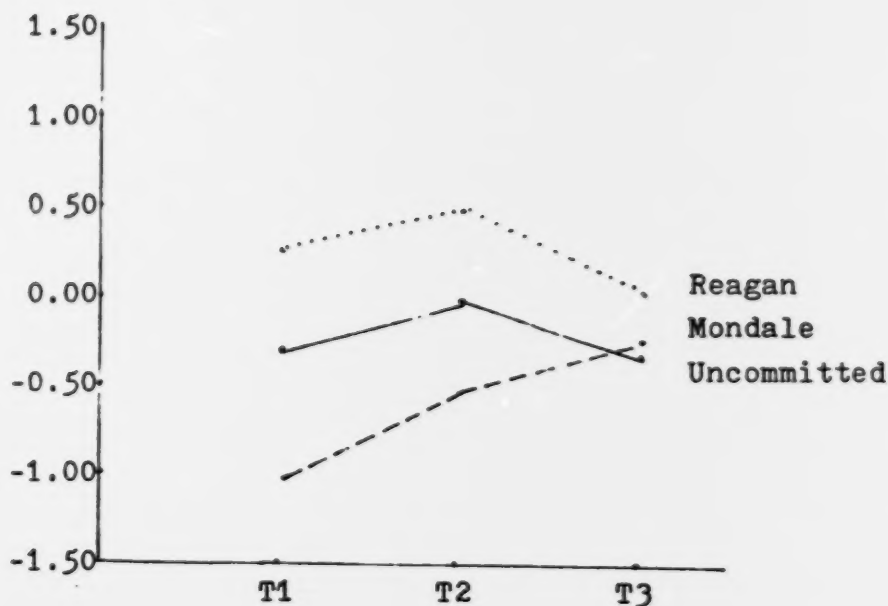


Figure 3
Perceptions of Candidates on
Factor 1 (Capability) by Uncommitteds

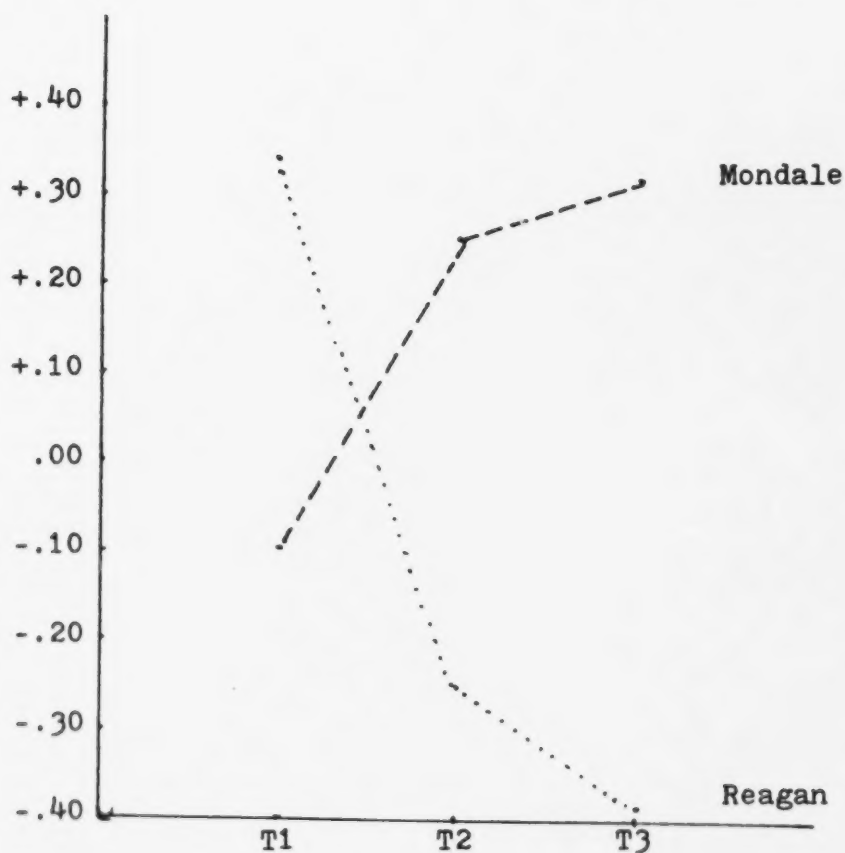
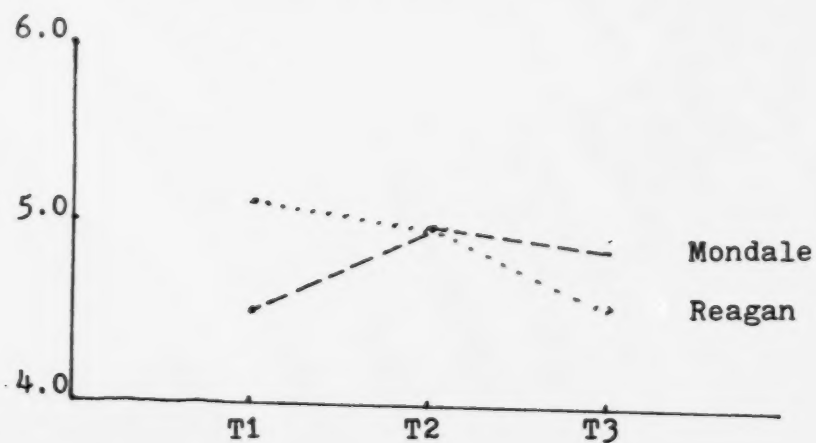


Figure 4
Overall Evaluations by Uncommitteds of Candidates'
Performances as a Function of Training



APPENDIX A

Instructions for Control Group

VIEWING THE DEBATES

Since John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon met in the first series of televised presidential debates in 1960, these encounters have served as focal points of the campaigns in which they have been held. In 1976 and 1980 the Carter-Ford and Carter-Reagan debates were watched by a large number of potential voters. Some observers believe that the debates may have contributed to the outcome of the election in each of those years.

Following the debate this evening you will be asked to evaluate the performance of each candidate according to a number of criteria. Watch carefully.

Instructions for Criteria Only Group

VIEWING THE DEBATES

Since John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon met in the first series of televised presidential debates in 1960, these encounters have served as focal points of the campaigns in which they have been held. In 1976 and 1980 the Carter-Ford and Carter-Reagan debates were watched by a large number of potential voters. Some observers believe that the debates may have contributed to the outcome of the election in each of those years.

Although the presidential debates have become popular events, they have been criticized for producing shallow argument and for overemphasizing a candidate's image rather than his position on issues. Speech Communication scholars Goodwin Berquist and James Golden have written: "The televised presidential debates enhance the power of style and delivery, deemphasize the importance of substance, and often obviate the need for a candidate to reveal his true identity and strongly held convictions. The grimace and the smile tend to count more than the quality of the argument."

In order to better evaluate the presidential debates of 1984, we may be interested in knowing what we can look for in the debates that might reemphasize the importance of substance. What types of things should we expect the candidates to do? Following are several guidelines that listeners might use when watching and evaluating the debates.

1. To what extent do the candidates respond fully and relevantly to the questions?
2. To what extent do the candidates offer well-supported reasons for their positions?
3. To what extent do the candidates effectively refute the positions expressed by their opponent?

Following the debate you will be asked to evaluate the performance of each of the candidates according to a number of criteria. Watch carefully.

Instructions for Group with Criteria plus Explanation

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In order to better evaluate the presidential debates of 1984, we may be interested in knowing what we can look for in the debates that might reemphasize the importance of substance. What types of things should we expect the candidates to do? Following are several guidelines that listeners might use when watching and evaluating the debates.

1. Are the candidates fully responsive to the questions?

The debate format calls for the candidates to respond to questions posed by a panel of journalists. We should expect that the candidates will provide appropriate and complete answers to the questions. To be appropriate, an answer must deal with the subject matter of the question. A complete answer is one which addresses all parts of the question.

Different types of questions may be asked. Some questions may ask for an explanation of the candidate's position; for example, "What is your position on arms control?" Other questions may ask for a justification or reason for a candidate's position; for example, "You have said that you favor negotiations with the Soviet Union, why do you believe that such talks can be successful?" Whichever type of question is involved, we should expect that the candidates will respond to the substantive issues and do so as completely as possible within the time limits. Candidates who do not comply with these requirements are denying the public important information.

2. Do the candidates offer well supported reasons for their positions?

One reason for incorporating debates into political campaigns has been the belief that a clash of opposing arguments gives voters a better opportunity to evaluate the positions of the candidates. To obtain this result, however, the debaters must be committed to supporting their conclusions with well reasoned arguments. If the debate produces little more than campaign slogans, the public interest will not be served. Therefore, we might examine both the amount and the quality of the support which the debaters provide.

In practice, the amount of support that a candidate can provide is limited by the debate format. One cannot provide extensive explanation or documentation in a two minute period. Nevertheless, we should demand that candidates provide as much support as time permits for each of the positions that they express. Appropriate support may include statistics, examples, quotations, or analogies. Whether a candidate is being asked to explain or justify, a satisfactory response will include supporting data.

In addition, the data which candidates use should be of an acceptable quality. The data need to be relevant to the issue being discussed. It must also be reasonably accurate--at the very least, candidates should provide some indication of the source of their information.

A concern for the use of well supported reasons in a debate emphasizes the clash of ideas. Listeners will be in a better position to evaluate the arguments if the participants offer such reasons and the viewers are attentive to them.

3. Do the candidates address themselves to the positions expressed by their opponent?

Debate formats allow the participants to respond to the arguments of their opponents. These are called opportunities for refutation or rebuttal. During a period of refutation we should expect a candidate to address the substance of the opponent's argument so that we may better understand how the positions of the candidates are similar or different. We should also expect that a candidate will address the reasons which the opponent has presented, evaluating them, and then offering alternative data where appropriate.

Rebuttal opportunities should not be used for personal attack on one's opponent. The central focus of refutation should be on issues rather than on personalities.

In their book about the 1976 presidential debates, Lloyd Bitzer and Theodore Rueter have written, "Political debates are desirable public policy as a means to inform the electorate, elevate the quality of political discourse, and give opponents equal and adequate opportunity to discuss their views on public issues." Debates are most likely to achieve these lofty objectives when the listeners demand that the participants adhere to principles of sound argument.

In watching and evaluating the debate this evening, then, we ask that you attempt to focus your attention on the following issues:

1. To what extent do the candidates respond fully and relevantly to the questions?
2. To what extent do the candidates offer well-supported reasons for their positions?
3. To what extent do the candidates effectively refute the positions expressed by their opponent?

Following the debate you will be asked to evaluate the performance of each of the candidates according to a number of criteria. Watch carefully.

APPENDIX B
PRE-DEBATE QUESTIONNAIRE

In order that we may more meaningfully interpret your response to the debate, we ask that you provide us with the following basic information. Also, in order for you to receive credit for having participated in the study, we ask that you sign your name. All information and responses will be kept strictly confidential by the researchers. Only a list of the students who participated will be forwarded to the Speech 103 instructors.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Name _____

Age _____ Sex M or F Class Fr or Soph

Speech 103 Instructor _____

Are you currently registered to vote? Yes No

If you are registered, do you intend to vote in the 1984 presidential election?

Yes No Uncertain

Which presidential candidate do you prefer?

_____ Ronald Reagan
_____ Walter Mondale
_____ Other
_____ Undecided

APPENDIX C

POST-DEBATE EVALUATION

Now that you have watched the debate, we would like you to spend a few minutes evaluating each of the candidates and their performance this evening. On the following pages you will find several types of evaluation scales. Please follow the directions given for each and respond to all scale items as missing answers will invalidate your evaluation.

Part I

Following are two sets of scales, one referring to Ronald Reagan and the other to Walter Mondale. The scales ask you to rate your general impressions of each of these gentlemen based on this evening's debate. Please fill out both sets of scales in the manner illustrated below.

One of the items you are asked to evaluate the candidates on is:

Fair: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: Unfair

If you feel that a given candidate is either extremely fair or extremely unfair, mark the scale in the following manner:

Fair: X:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: Unfair

or like this

Fair: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: X: Unfair

If you feel that a given candidate is either relatively fair or relatively unfair, mark the scale like this:

Fair: __:__: X:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: Unfair

or likethis

Fair: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: X:__: __:__: Unfair

If you feel that a given candidate is only somewhat fair or somewhat unfair, mark the scale like this:

Fair: __:__: __:__: X:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: Unfair

or like this

Fair: __:__: __:__: __:__: __:__: X:__: __:__: Unfair

Finally, if you are honestly undecided about how you feel, place an "X" in the center space like this:

Fair: __:__: __:__: __:__: X:__: __:__: __:__: Unfair

PLEASE RESPOND TO ALL ITEMS FOR EACH CANDIDATE

In my opinion, Ronald Reagan appeared:

Logical:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Illogical
Active:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Passive
Closed:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Open
Warm:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Cold
Strong:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Weak
Immoral:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Moral
Conservative:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Liberal
Energetic:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Lethargic
Evasive:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Direct
Friendly:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Hostile
Confident:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unconfident
Unfair:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Fair
Religious:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Irreligious
Informed:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Uninformed
Unqualified:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Qualified
Extroverted:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Introverted
Sincere:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Insincere
Humorless:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Humorous
Decisive:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Indecisive
Just:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unjust
Unattractive:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Attractive
Intelligent:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unintelligent
Animated:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Lifeless
Dishonest:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Honest
Likeable:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unlikeable
Hard:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Soft
Inconsistent:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Consistent
Clear:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Vague
Wise:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Foolish
Dull:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Interesting
Genuine:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Phony
Pleasant:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unpleasant
Flexible:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Inflexible
Ethical:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unethical
Young:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Old

In my opinion, Walter Mondale appeared:

Logical:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Illogical
Active:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Passive
Closed:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Open
Warm:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Cold
Strong:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Weak
Immoral:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Moral
Conservative:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Liberal
Energetic:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Lethargic
Evasive:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Direct
Friendly:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Hostile
Confident:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unconfident
Unfair:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Fair
Religious:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Irreligious
Informed:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Uninformed
Unqualified:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Qualified
Extroverted:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Introverted
Sincere:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Insincere
Humorless:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Humorous
Decisive:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Indecisive
Just:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unjust
Unattractive:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Attractive
Intelligent:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unintelligent
Animated:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Lifeless
Dishonest:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Honest
Likeable:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unlikeable
Hard:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Soft
Inconsistent:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Consistent
Clear:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Vague
Wise:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Foolish
Dull:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Interesting
Genuine:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Phony
Pleasant:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unpleasant
Flexible:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Inflexible
Ethical:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Unethical
Young:	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Old

In my opinion, the overall performance of Ronald Reagan in the debate was:

Excellent: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: Poor

In my opinion, the overall performance of Walter Mondale in the debate was:

Excellent: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: ____: Poor

Part II

Please rank order the following ten items in terms of how important you believe each was to your evaluation of the candidates in this evening's debate. You are not rating the candidates on these items; instead you are describing how important each item was to your evaluation.

Place a "1" in the space to the left of the item which you consider to be of greatest importance, a "2" next to the second most important factor, and so on down to the number 10 (the least important factor in your judgment). Please rate all ten factors. Please do not tie two or more items.

I based my judgments upon the extent to which each candidate:

- _____ spoke clearly and articulately
- _____ used appropriate and effective language
- _____ backed up his answers with specifics
- _____ responded to questions directly and completely
- _____ maintained good eye contact
- _____ used gestures to emphasize his points
- _____ seemed relaxed and confident
- _____ refuted the arguments of his opponent
- _____ seemed prepared and knowledgeable
- _____ was friendly and courteous

Please attach this form to your pre-debate questionnaire and return them both before leaving.

Thank you for participating.

NOTES

¹Walter Lippmann, Essays in the Public Philosophy (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955), chap. 9, sec. 3.

²Lloyd Bitzer and Theodore Rueter, Carter vs Ford: The Counterfeit Debates of 1976 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), p. 4.

³Sidney Kraus, "Presidential Debates: Images and Issues," Christian Science Monitor, 4 October 1984, p. 15.

⁴Myles Martel, Political Campaign Debates (New York: Longman, 1983), p. 146.

⁵Judith S. Trent and Robert V. Friedenberg, Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 265.

⁶In order to be considered as helping to define a factor, a variable had to load at .40 or greater with its highest loading on the factor in question. Moreover, those variables passing the "60-40" test were considered most relevant to defining a given factor.

⁷James McCroskey, William Holdridge and J. Kevin Toomb, "An Instrument for Measuring the Source Credibility of Basic Speech Communication Instructors," Speech Teacher, 23 (1974), pp. 26-33.

⁸Raw data and factor score coefficient matrices are available upon request.